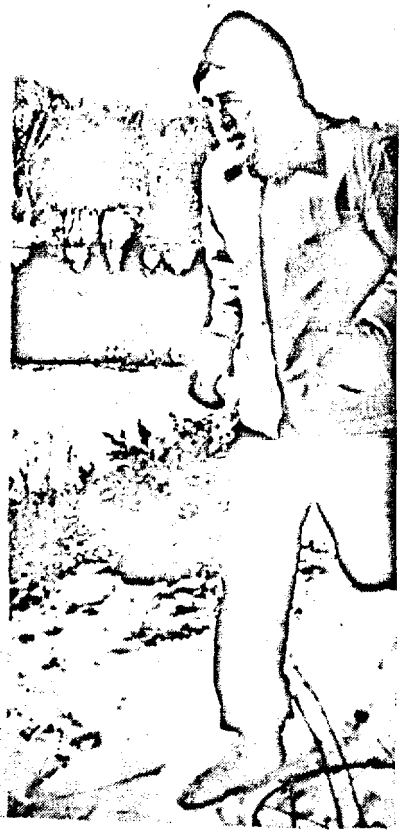
File only.

People are asking what—or whether—George Romney thinks about major issues. A revealing study of the man and his views

Whether he is stump-speaking, wind-sprinting or visiting Vietnam (*opposite*), Romney's energy is vast.



Puzzling Front Runner

by BROCK BROWER

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Partly it's his busy schedule—already getting tight right up to, and possibly including, the Republican nomination in 1968—but it's also a certain rigidity in the man himself. At least, during long months of trailing after Governor George Romney, in search just of the present man, not necessarily the next President, the only way I ever found to catch him anything like alone with his thoughts was to move up hard on his outside shoulder at around 6 o'clock one winter morning and stay with him for two chilly miles as he ran his lonely constitutional over the icy windings of the country club out back of his Bloomfield Hills, Mich. home.

In that freezing dark before the Detroit dawn, settled most comfortably into his own exertions, he seemed, ironically, to relax for once—to let up a little. Not that anything very earth-shaking got said. He sets a mean pace, that man—four wind sprints over ice-caked macadam, and it would've been six, he threatened, if we'd been able to break through the snow on the buried links—so there wasn't much breath left for chitchat. But what did get said was at least minus that grandiloquent waffling that so often confounds what he utters, not only at a press conference on Vietnam, but across the table during what should be easy banter about the simplest human concerns. In fact, nobody can sound more like the public George Romney than the real George Romney let loose to ramble, inevitably away from the point and toward some distant moral precept. So it was actually a relief to be finally at his elbow in circumstances that didn't allow him his expansive and intimical campaign he has undertaken since. "Nothing is more important than falling in love with the right girl, and doing it early," he's prone to say. As usual, he entered as something of an underdog—Lenore's family was a large social cut above his own straitened circumstances—and he had to get a friend to ask her for their first date. "People won't believe it now," the governor admits, "but I was really a shy person."

Soon enough, however, he'd set a siege to her that he seems never to have lifted. "I don't think it was me," she claims, thinking back over their early courtship. "I think he would have done it with anybody he decided to concentrate on." Back in 1929, he even passed up a brief try at college, the University of Utah, in order to pursue Lenore—first to Washington, D.C., where she'd just finished up George Washington University, then to New York City, where she went to study acting, and then to Hollywood, where he finally talked her out of an impending starlet's contract and into marrying him.

"My mother insisted that I go out with somebody else," Lenore remembers—and sometimes she did, while George paced the edge of the dance floor "like a police dog," and once even physically carried her off it when he decided she'd danced long enough with that other fella—"but I never met anybody who had that forceful personality."

It is undeniably there, operating almost physically upon all those who work around him. Nobody on his staff, for instance—a group of somewhat naive young men in their 30s, a number of them out of various Michigan political science departments—seems to have been told to go get in decent shape. But, as his administrative assistant, Albert A. Applegate, says, "He pushes himself so hard, he doesn't have to push you. You push yourself." Applegate has given up smoking, and other staff men have started running early in the morning, or using the noon hour for a quick swim. Partly it's defensive, the only way to keep up with the governor's early morning momentum. "If you've stayed in the sack until 10 minutes before coming to the office," says Dr. Walter D. [illegible] intellectual, "*forget* about it!"

But then there is another young man named Richard Headlee, an [illegible] associates, who frankly says he became a convert to Romney's Mormon religion "mainly because he outran me." Apparently Headlee started with Romney down a long corridor in Detroit's huge auditorium, Cobo Hall, one afternoon, still feeling 25 years the governor's junior, and ended up in near geriatric collapse. With the governor, of course, still going strong: "There was this Polish band there. He grabbed my wife, Mary, and started polka-ing with her. Then he shook hands with all the kids. And then he went out and delivered a speech. I was still sitting there, panting. I figured I had to do something." Headlee was visited by two Mormon missionaries who offered to pray for him in his efforts to quit smoking. He did quit, and eventually joined the church, still flabbergasted by his exemplar's stamina. "This is something that Nixon and Johnson have never reckoned with," he warns.

It would be unfair, however, to picture Romney's forcefulness as merely strenuous Christianizing. Howard Hallas, a long-time public relations man for American Motors, and not a man likely to be out doing road work at dawn, sees the governor as a kind of Henry Ford plus Wendell Willkie. "He was the first businessman I'd ever met who made me feel I had to go home and get all my college ideals out of the trunk in the attic where I'd left them long ago," he says. But it was the administrative acuity accompanying the idealism that impressed him most about Romney. This combination, Hallas believes, is what really brought a foundering automobile company back into aggressive competition with the giants from 1958 to 1962. Hallas shakes his head over the doubts that are sometimes leveled at Romney's capacities for larger leadership: "The trouble is that the press doesn't believe he's for real. Whether he's right or wrong, he's for real."

But when it comes time to ask Romney himself just how he's for real, the difficulties start. The right words elude him, and in their place come platitudes, pieties, and talk about "fundamen-

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tal basic relationships" that simply frustrate inquiry. He seems to know he has a problem. "I don't consider myself a particularly eloquent individual. I'm really only effective when I'm talking about something I really believe in." He prefers "rather plain terms," and will desert his written text whenever he feels he isn't "getting into things deeply enough." He believes people listen to him "not because of the words I'm using, but because I have something to say."

All this makes it hard to pin down the exact shape of his beliefs. Some of his pet ideas—"a tithe of time," which is his Mormon way of asking Youth to Serve; "consumerism," a theory that the American economy is really controlled by the buyer, not the capitalist; "a second chance for the states," which is his hope for a viable and creative federalism—are politically courageous but, at least the way he puts them, terribly vague, even cranky. He hates to be positioned anywhere specifically in the left-to-right political spectrum. "I was doing okay," he once said, truculently, "until somebody started calling me a 'liberal-moderate.'" He denies any and all such labels. If he is with the liberals on civil rights and against political extremism, he is with the conservatives on sound fiscal policy and against centralized federal controls. And typically, his speech at Hartford, Conn. on Vietnam left him neither a hawk nor a dove. It was a patriotic announcement, backing the present U.S. military commitment, that still left him what he calls "my options"—a political mobility which he zealously protects.

But, for all this fuzziness, there is still no doubt where at least the seat of his belief lies. Of all the speeches I heard him deliver this past winter, none was more clearly felt, more "what I really believe," than a talk he gave one Sunday morning in Anchorage, Alaska—and the occasion is important—to a conference of his fellow Mormons in their "stake building." He was speaking within church ritual, as Brother Romney giving testimony to his faith in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and he fairly shook the pews with his clear evangelical fervor.

"To whatever extent I've understood the Mormon religion," says Edward L. Cushman, a director of American Motors and an Episcopalian, pointing to a row of books he's read on the Latter-day Saints, "I've understood George better. Everything starts with that, and ends with that."

Romney has the deepest faith in what must be one of the world's most fundamentalist religions. There is a saying that it is very hard to be a Mormon, or, as a Mormon prefers to call himself, a Saint. And, indeed, anyone looking into the beliefs of the church, however cursorily, cannot help but wonder at the immense salvational task the Saints have assumed, at the demands their faith makes of them, and consequently, at the individual burden that George Romney, has taken up.

Essentially, the Saints believe they have been directed by God to bring what they call "the Restored Gospel" to a world that has fallen into total corruption, even in its other leading Christian religions. The particular Christianity that the Saints preach stems from a separate and nonscriptural appearance they believe Christ made upon the American continent after the Ascension.

At that time, they say, Christ preached His Gospel to a people descended from one of the Lost Tribes of Israel that supposedly crossed the ocean to this land in 660 B.C. The only record of this ministry, and much else of later theological importance, was contained in tablets of gold left in a cave in Hill Cumorah near Palmyra, N.Y. In the early 1800s, the Angel Moroni appeared to a youth named Joseph Smith and directed him to the secreted to various Mormon communities.

His father suffered four different bankruptcies, and Romney has memories of poverty on a potato farm in Idaho. It didn't grieve him much when the family moved to Salt Lake City.

That city, of course, is where Brigham Young brought the Saints overland from Nauvoo, Ill. after the assassination of Prophet Smith, and it is here that Romney's own background appears so clearly a part of the long, stern history of the Gathering, as it is called. During a short visit there last February the governor took me for a predawn walk around the Temple Square district to the spots where he'd gone to school, courted Lenore and found at last something like roots. Right across from the Temple used to be Latter-day Saints High School: "When I was in my senior year, a friend nominated me for student body president, and Lenore was running for vice president. She'd always been a class officer, and I hadn't. But I won, and she lost. I finally asked somebody why, and he said, 'We figured if you were elected, and she were, she'd end up running the class.'"

We walked around past the football field, an excavation now —"I tried to be an athlete. Wow, I tried. I went out for football when I only weighed 105 pounds" —then to the monument raised to the sea gull, a savior of the Saints' crops on one occasion, according to Mormon history.

"The sea gulls came and ate the crickets and then disgorged into the lake, and returned again and again," Romney said. "When I grew up here, I knew people who'd seen them."

We entered Temple Square and suddenly he turned and began counting something off on his fingers—theologies: "There are only three basic Christian positions. Catholic, which is authority from Jesus Christ. Then there are the various Protestants who broke from the Catholics. And then there's the restored authority, which is the Latter-day Saints. The Book of Mormon, all it is is further proof of Christ's divinity. There's all this effort to make Him into just a man, but the Book of Mormon shows He actually appeared on this continent."

Down a winding path we came to a statue out of Mormon history, the straining figure of a Saint pulling a handcart, with all his earthly belongings, across the barren mid-continent to the promised land. "That's how my maternal grandmother came here," he said, with pride. "She was only 13, and she walked behind her father's cart all the way."

Then he turned and pointed up to a slender golden sentinel atop one of the Temple spires, the Angel Moroni with his long trumpet

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raised to the mountains, like a heated sunray. He began to tell me about Moroni, and suddenly I realized I was listening to the three-time governor of Michigan explain to me why angels don't have wings:

"We don't believe angels have wings. God created man in His image, and Jesus said, 'The Father is in Me.' So why would God create something more than man, something more than Himself?" Moroni is a "resurrected being," not a creature of flight.

In that early matinal light, it made a delightful kind of sense, and more than that, I began to see why Romney is capable sometimes of making statements that are almost cases of overbelief. All candidates, for instance, at one time or another express some measure of faith in the Constitution of the United States, but Romney refers to that document as "divinely inspired." He means it literally, following a Mormon teaching that the U.S. has been singled out by God for a special providence. He never discusses this very directly, but First Counselor Hugh B. Brown told me: "We believe that God is in charge of this world, and that this is a choice land, and so this document must have His divine blessing. No man has within himself the wisdom to set forth such inspired truths without divine guidance."

This providential faith in America's greatness crops up time and again as the one reverberating certainty in Romney's often hazy political pronouncements. It is also easy to see it as the source of his instantaneous anger the morning he picked up the paper; nothing could have run more counter to that faith than what had been disclosed about CIA operations. And it is right in this area, not in any matter of prayer or fasting, that his religious fundamentalism touches day-to-day American democracy. It is hard to say that the two come in conflict, however, for the governor sees his religion and his country as representing a sort of single mythic heritage.

Romney simply has that unique ability of a Saint to see this land as both free and divine, and he does not bother to trim his vision to suit any elaborate worry over the separation of church and state. He told an Anchorage audience, for instance, that he was proud to say that it was a Michigan congressman who proposed that the phrase "under God" be inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. He says he wants "a clear-cut separation between church and state," that he agrees, for example, with the Supreme Court decision against "state-prepared prayer. But I've never seen any harm in some general expression of devotion, as long as it was spontaneous. It's the foundation of American life. I think that the religious principles that helped shape our nation should properly be taught, as part of our history."

"Look," he launches forth more generally. "You wipe out the concept of a universe founded by our Creator, and then there's no yardstick. Then there's just individual opinion. Khrushchev did a very clever thing when he was here at the National Press Club. He began, 'Comrades!' Then he stopped and said, 'No, excuse me, you don't call each other 'Comrade' here in the United States, do you? Gentlemen!' So the whole world got the idea that we didn't believe in comradeship. But our relationship is not that of gentlemen. It isn't the Communists' cold concept of comradeship either. It's brothers and sisters, isn't it? We have a common creed. And if you once move away from that basic creed —that 'rock,' as Lincoln called the Declaration of Independence —the minute you move away from that, you're into the quicksands of just man's opinion."

This is a politics of zeal that goes well beyond the usual workings of government—certainly of state government—but, still and all, what's important to remember is that it represents a devout mind, not in any way a captive mind. George Romney may consider himself the servant of God, but he is not the instrument of the Church of Jesus Christ of [illegible] no question of his ever yielding up his own prerogatives on any issue upon which the Church's General Authorities take a political stand. The Saints believe, above all, in free agency; and Romney is emphatically, even stubbornly, a free agent, determining his own course. He has made abundantly clear his political disagreement with such ultraconservatives as Apostle Ezra Taft Benson and his son, Reed Benson, a John Birch Society representative. And on the racial issue, while he must accept his church's theological position on the Negro, he has probably done more than any other Republican in the area of civil rights, and over a longer period of time.

"If my church prevented me in any way from dedicating myself to the elimination of social injustice and discrimination, I would not belong to it—but that is not the case," he answered a Negro minister's doubts at a meeting of the Salt Lake Ministerial Association, a Protestant group. He believes he should be judged by his actions, "not on someone's idea of what the precepts of my religion are." And he can point to the Negro vote in Michigan, which has increased from 11% to 35% in his favor during his three gubernatorial campaigns, as proof that he is being so judged.

Also, it is clear that Romney would wish his church's position on the Negro's right to the priesthood to change, if that were theologically possible: "A lot of people don't understand this. If my church were a church where you could get the bishops together and discuss this, then maybe I could do something about it, undertake to politic in some manner. But my church just isn't that kind of a church." It would require a revelation through the present Prophet, David O. McKay, to open the priesthood to the few Negro Mormons who presently exist, and First Counselor Brown warns, "I think it would be detrimental to him for the church to come out with a revelation right now. It would have a reverse effect"—*i.e.*, that of appearing to revise God's word to assist a possible candidacy.

And finally, though his early life may have been spent within the tightly knit Mormon community, his middle years were

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Even as a widely traveled, hard-knocks member of [illegible] rose-patch, the American business community. If he is initially the product of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he is ultimately just as much the product of American Motors, which introduced not only the Rambler but Romney himself to the national public.

"In 1954," Cushman asks rhetorically, "who'd ever heard of George Romney?" He'd held several lesser posts in industry, but not until George Mason, president of Nash-Kelvinator, hired him in 1948 did he lay a hand on any real executive power. Six years later, when Mason died after creating American Motors out of a merger with Hudson, Romney became the largely unheralded new president of a largely unheralded new automobile company that had already chalked up a first-year loss of $11 million. That he brought American Motors back in five years to a profit of $60 million was conceded, even in the tough-minded automobile industry, to be both a minor miracle and pretty damn good for a first try.

With really very little tooling behind him to build much of a line of cars, Romney went on a mission to convert the American public to "the compact"—a vehicle that could be operated economically, that wouldn't change style radically every year, and would therefore always have a high resale value, and that limited American Motors could produce. The forces of evil were manifest in the "gas-guzzling dinosaurs"—Romney's own phrase. The forces of good were single-unit construction, dual safety brakes, etc., and then a profit-sharing contract with the U.A.W. While instituting these innovations, Romney also managed to bring back a defunct Nash model as the Rambler American in 1959, an automotive resurrection, he's proud to say, "that had never been done before."

He did, admittedly, personalize the company to a large extent, even speaking out as president in full-page ads. "It got to be such a thing that Romney was bigger than the company," says an automotive official. Still, when he left in 1963 for the governorship, there were current assets of over $116 million in the company's treasury.

As for the debacle that occurred at American Motors after his departure—a straight downward performance, since 1963, with a loss of over $12 million last year—all Romney will say is, "If I had remained, I would have followed a different product program than the present one." By that he probably means he would have continued along much the same way he was going. The irony is that many automobile people, apparently inside American Motors as well as out, were not altogether comfortable with Romney's kind of success. His triumph had come at the expense of industrial fellow-feeling in Detroit.

"He did become a bit of a pariah," a close acquaintance recalls. "I sensed he was being excommunicated from the halls of industry." So, once he was gone, American Motors, unhappy in its snubbed prosperity, reverted to Detroit's complete-line-of-cars syndrome and sank toward lower sales as rapidly as it did into conformity. Romney could only look on in shocked silence, since he was completely disaffiliated from the company by his new public career.

That career, meanwhile, proceeded ahead with his usual record of startling successes. He moved onward and upward through ever-increasing gubernatorial majorities—51.4% of the total vote in 1962, 56.3% in 1964, 61.4% in 1966—to solid presidential hopefulness. In fact, some polls show him as the victor over every possible candidate, including President Johnson and Robert F. Kennedy. But despite his sanguine prospects, there lurks a distinct possibility that the Republican party will react to it, and him, exactly the same way American Motors did.

Indeed, there are some curious parallels between his business career and his political career. In the late '50s he entered public life, once again as something of an evangel, through his nonpartisan Citizens for Michigan. He was on another mission, this time to gain for the faltering state government, [illegible] deadlocked between a recalcitrant Republican legislature and six-time Democratic Governor G. Mennen Williams, a chance to become a modern political instrumentality—that "second chance" he often holds out for other states in his speeches on creative federalism. He worked hard to bring about a constitutional convention in 1960, and he then fought diligently and successfully to see that the new constitution included a permanent civil rights commission. In fact, out of Con Con, as the convention was called, came the political base for his first campaign for governor in 1962.

And as a candidate, again he innovated. He went directly after the labor vote, going so far as to barge in on rallies and demand to be heard. It was almost like being on the street corner again, arguing with hecklers. Gus Scholle, head of Michigan's AFL-CIO, finally reached a point where he reportedly said of his own men, "I can't let you talk to them, George. You'll snow them."

And when he won, Romney once again sought to perform good works. "He got far more 'special-interest labor legislation,' if you want to call it that, passed than Williams ever did," says Administrative Assistant Applegate, referring to the minimum-wage bill and the construction-safety law, both enacted during Romney's first term. He pushed Michigan forward, if only a little way, in education, hospitals and welfare, taking advantage of every federal program of aid to the states that he could. Beyond all this, he appointed more Negroes to high and visible state office than any previous governor. The state, though still in a fiscal muddle, at least bears the strong impress of his reforming tendencies.

Yet already, while still maintaining a peak of national popularity he hardly believes himself, and after having carried Republican Senator Robert Griffin and five new Republican congressional candidates with him in the 1966 Michigan elections, there are signs that grander Republican politicians—and not reactionaries, but moderates—find him a little uncomfortable to be with. His independence irritates them. He doesn't share their fellow feeling for the Grand Old Party. He is no more really a party man than he was ever really a Detroiter.

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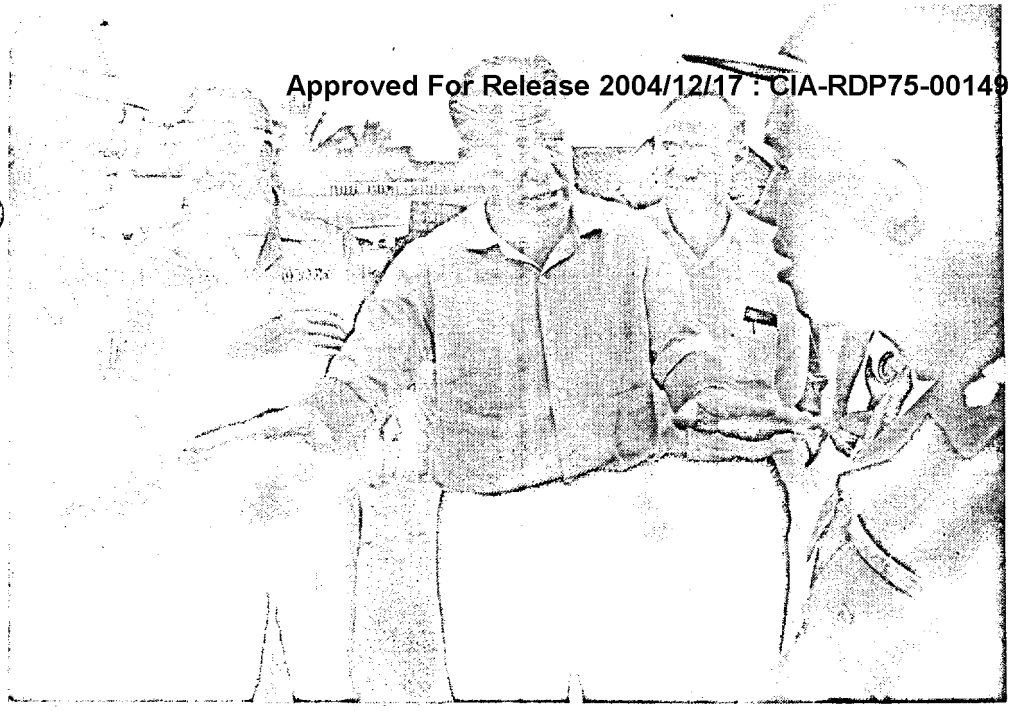

On a fact-seeking visit to Vietnam with other governors in November, 1965, Romney (foreground) and Governor Clifford Hansen of Wyoming talk to troops in Phan Thiet province.

Major party leaders have been out to Lansing to lecture him sternly for acting "like a provincial" in his campaign so far, and some have finally thrown up their hands at what they can only see as his sanctimoniousness in dealing with issues and people. Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, for one, is both hovering near him and hounding him from afar, for Rockefeller has already had enough experience with the man to know his intransigence. An incident between these two at the 1964 Republican convention tells a lot about Romney's effect on his fellow party members.

Romney refused to join Rockefeller in framing a mutual resolution on civil rights. Not that he disagreed. It was simply that he didn't want to be in anybody else's entourage, much as he never likes to be a signatory to somebody else's blanket resolve. He had his own civil rights resolution. As he walked up to the rostrum to offer it with the full brimstone of his liberal ire, he passed Rockefeller, who said to him, "George, you really are a damn loner, aren't you?"

That's about the size of it. Underneath all that moral rearmament, all that gregariousness, all that thunderclap energy, there is a confirmed loner. The only one who is really close to him, in any important way, is Lenore, and together they are really his political team. She often speaks from the same platform with him, and he always says she is a hard act to follow—and she is. There she stands, petite, the mother of four grown children, gracefully recalling a few sudden right words, her eyes shining with a light like dew on blue steel. With perfect timbre, she lists off several moral imperatives: "People say to me, 'We don't have to do these things,' and I say to them, 'What about the "have-to" right here?' " And her hand just touches her heart, the way nobody ever gets it right in the movies. Then her husband rises to speak the patriarchal truth about the Great Society, calling it "the Great Facade," warning against it as though it were some cheap carnival come to town to bilk all the good citizens. Then they both depart, bearing certainties that would choke a leviathan.

This simply isn't customary politics. In fact, none of Romney's qualities—his religiosity, his early rising, his loner's independence, his strong desire to confront the opposition, his innovating temperament and, ultimately, this familial piety that he and Lenore share—none of them are what Republicans are used to embracing in their candidates. Still, the irony is that he is the one man among them who has most successfully overcome their own incompatibility with the national electorate.

"The Name of the Game is Winning" reads the motto on his most recent campaign literature, and Romney has learned his skills at it in the adversity of a normally Democratic state with a huge labor vote. He has brought forth voter support from barren election districts much the way the Saints brought forth sustenance out of the Western desert. And he has done it with the hard work and persistence that is creedal in the Saints' life style, resorting to methods as simple, and yet as impressive and startling, as that Mormon handcart—anything that would humanly get him there. As his executive assistant, DeVries, says, he is "an experimenter," and he himself loves to quote the motto carved in concrete over the American Motors Building: "I've Thought of a Better Way." His staff is kept loosely organized so no formal channels will constrict or impede the flow of possible better ideas. "I avoid any committee structure, any filtered operation," he says. "I try to keep the situation open, so that ideas reach me." Any number have, and out of these he has formed novel campaign tactics that reaffirm a sense of community during his electioneering, that put him right in touch with an electorate which seems to be just plain tired of feeling alienated. He has found a better way, if not to enlighten the critical mind, at least to reach the uncomfortable common heart.

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In 1966, for example, Romney made use of what were called "Home Headquarters." They gave us a lot of satisfaction," he says. "They had the virtue of store fronts, but you didn't need to staff them with volunteers." Very simply, what happened was that 156 different families in the Detroit area opened up their homes as local headquarters for the Romney campaign. Literature was spread around the dining-room table. One member of the family, usually the mother, stayed by the telephone to receive local questions and to call into central headquarters for answers. And finally a party was held at each of the Home Headquarters with the governor inevitably appearing to sip juice, meet the folks, check in with the kitchen help, and generally elevate the lady of the house about a dozen social notches in her neighbors' estimation.

I checked back over one day's route through these Home Headquarters, and although I did not gain any greater insight into the confused pattern of his thinking, I certainly saw everywhere the ravages of that forceful personality. If there is any question as to why Romney almost carried Detroit and made inroads into other traditionally Democratic areas, or as to just what it is that makes Romney—despite his sanctimoniousness or his fuzziness or his stubbornness—probably the most devastating campaigner the Republicans have in their ranks, here are three reactions:

Mrs. Theodore S. Greene, a Negro, who had 60 people at her party: "I was really shocked that it wasn't hard to sell him to Negroes. I just don't think people question him much any more. You can just look around him and see he has some very outstanding Negroes in some very high jobs. Yes, I had some arguments with Negroes about the Mormon Bible, but it's in all the Bibles. I told them, 'You mustn't be very familiar with our own Bible.'"

Mrs. Charlotte Smith, a former Polish refugee who entertained some 200: "I'm trying to explain to foreign-born people not to be ashamed to be a Republican. They come to this country and automatically become Democrats, then stick to it blindly. But the foreign-born feel Romney is a self-made man. The common people, they admire him for what he did at American Motors. Now that American Motors is in trouble again, they feel even more that he is the man who knows how to do it."

And Jerry Kohn, a Jew who had a hundred people drop by his house: "It wasn't just a gimmick with me. I'm sincerely devoted to the career of George Romney. He has class written all over him, and the fact that he took on the giants and whipped them. He's only approaching his potential. I'll tell you, we're just little people, but we have a tremendous capacity for work if they want us.

"He radiates. He is the most *electable* man"—and Mr. Kohn paused for a slight frown, one I have seen on many a face—"if he can only get his thoughts together."